DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 710 EA 031 428

AUTHOR	Malone, Bobby G.; Sharp, William L.; Walter, James K.
TITLE	What's Right about the Principalship?
PUB DATE	2001-10-00
NOTE	16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 24-27, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Job Development; *Job Satisfaction; *Motivation Techniques; Occupational Information; *Principals; Public Schools; *Recruitment; Salaries; Wages

ABSTRACT

Superintendents report the principal's job as overly demanding in light of the compensation that is provided. While the negative aspects of the principal's job are well documented and are communicated to students in principal preparation programs, principals do report a high degree of job satisfaction with their chosen profession. In this study, the researchers tried to ascertain the "motivators" of the principal's job: What is right about the position, and what are those aspects that contribute to the high job satisfaction reported by principals? The findings from questionnaires returned indicate that the negative depiction in the literature is not the picture that principals report when they participate in research studies. Additional questions are whether the negative side of a principal's job is fabricated or is unintentionally used as a motivational device to challenge those who elect to become principals. The perceptions of working principals emphasize the positive aspects of the position, which may very well serve as a motivating force for those who are trying to decide if they want to become principals. (Contains 19 references.) (DFR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 458 710

EA

What's Right About the Principalship?

By

Bobby G. Malone & William L. Sharp Ball State University, Muncie, IN

James K. Walter Texas A & M University, Corpus Christi, TX

A paper presented at the Midwest Research Association

Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois

October 24-27, 2001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B. Malone

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 031 428

Abstract

What's Right About the Principalship?

Bobby G. Malone and William L. Sharp Ball State University

James K. Walter Texas A & M University Corpus Christi

Students in principal preparation programs hear enough of the negative aspects of the principal's job to cause them to think twice about going into the profession. Superintendents report the principal's job as overly demanding in light of the compensation that is provided. While the negative aspects of the principal's job are well documented, principals report a high degree of job satisfaction with their chosen profession. What's right about the position? What are those aspects that contribute to the high job satisfaction reported by principals?

In this study the researchers tried to ascertain the "motivators" of the principal's job, and obviously, the way principals perceive their job provides an eye-witness account. The gloom-and-doom depiction that is present in the literature is not the picture that principals report when they participate in research studies. Is the negative side fabricated? Or, is it unintentionally used as a motivational device to challenge those who have elected the principalship as their career? Significance of this study lies in the perceptions of principals -- those who actually do the work. Emphasizing the positive aspects of the job may very well serve as a motivating force for those who are trying to decide if they want to become a principal or not.

Title: The Principalship: What's Right About It?

Presenters: Bobby Malone and William Sharp
Ball State University
James K. Walter,
Texas A & M, Corpus Christi
Phone: 765-285-8490
E-mail: **bmalone@bsu.edu**

Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

The professional literature on the principalship leads one to believe the job is overly demanding. Superintendents list the demands of the job and the time it consumes as one of the barriers for entering the principalship. Superintendents also couple the demands and time consuming nature of the job with the relatively low compensation. Principals confirmed this, especially at the high school level (Malone, Sharp & Thompson, 2000). While this perception is undoubtedly accurate in the minds of those who perform the job, it is also well established that principals report a high degree of job satisfaction (Malone, Sharp, & Thompson, 2000: Robinson, 1999; Reynolds, 1999; Jolly, 1999). Yes, the job is very demanding, yet very satisfying -- an interesting observation, yet seemingly a conflicting one.

The Problem

Examining the literature on the subject of principal preparation, one finds that instructors within the preparation programs often accentuate the negative aspects of the job. Most, having had experience as principals themselves, may be removed from the realities of the job and tend to remember only those aspects that were negative. Why did they leave the principalship in the first

place? The most often occurring answer is usually to seek what is viewed as a higher position in administration, e.g. superintendency, professoriate. The very aspects of the job that attracted them to the job in the first place may be viewed through a filter of subsequent jobs they held after leaving the principalship.

Obviously, there are aspects of the principal's job that are highly attractive. The opportunity to lead a school faculty and staff to accomplish goals and visions that a person has for herself/ himself is worthy and noble, yet it may be viewed by some people as negative, as self serving, or perhaps to meet a need for power. The accusation may be accurate, but effective principals know how to broker power in such a way as to enlist the faculty, staff and community toward a common goal. When parents and teachers know that the principal has the best interests of the students at heart, most rally and come to support his/her efforts. Does such support contribute to high job satisfaction?

Effective principals have an abiding knowledge that parents send the schools their very best -- their children. It is an awe-inspiring responsibility to be given one's most cherished possession with the belief that you are the very best person to be given that trust. Effective principals feel this responsibility deeply and take actions to live up to its entangling encumbrances. The principal takes action, in turn, to provide a safe place, a faculty that is the very best that can be employed, and the resources that are necessary for the faculty and students to do their work. The principal maintains order and tries to establish a climate that is a warm and welcoming place. Students who go to school in such an environment enjoy it. It is better than being alone and not being with their friends. Students take pride in such a school, report respect for their teachers, and realize the importance of the preparation they are receiving for their life's work. For most principals working with students and seeing them grow and develop is a motivating factor in their job.

Written evidence from students in principal preparation programs who were asked to give reasons as to why they wanted to become administrators offers insight into the motivators that are used in making the decision to become a principal. Students mentioned most often that they wanted to "make a difference for kids," to be able to "influence the direction their school had chosen," and "I am ready to assume the responsibilities of being a leader." On the other hand, these same students often mentioned the fact that they thought they could do a better job of leading than the principal(s) they had worked under as teachers (Malone, 2001).

The environment in which one works is crucial to job motivation and job satisfaction, but there are different conditions or factors that make up the environment. If the community supports the school, parents will be found at school events working to make the conditions for the youngsters even better. Schools are viewed as a report card of the health of the community. In communities where the clientele take the report card seriously, community support becomes a tremendous advantage for the students who attend the schools. Likewise, administrators and teachers view community support as an essential factor in locating a desirable place to teach and administer. While this seems logical, does the principal view such support as contributing to job satisfaction?

The demands placed upon the school for excellence reflect a standard that permeates the individuals who work there. If little is expected, little will be accomplished. The personnel will accommodate to the norm; however, where the parents and community demand a higher standard, the administration and staff read the message quite clearly and their behavior is reflected in better teaching practices and higher expectations for the students who sit under the tutelage of the teachers who are hired. Well-articulated expectations of the leader provide the anticipatory set for those who carry out the instructional activities of the school. Low expectations lead to low

accomplishments and high expectations lead to transformed schools. Such basics of leadership provide incentives for aspiring principals to take on the role of school leader. Phrased in the vernacular, those who aspire to the principalship just want the opportunity to see what they can do.

The work environment is influenced by the chemistry of those working within the schools. Teachers and administrators need to have a common mission, a common language that is focused on expanded student learning. The interpersonal relations of people who work within an organization are extremely important. The effective school has faculty and staff who genuinely enjoy being together with each other as well as with their students. The value of one's job is in direct proportion to the skills, attitudes and values of those with whom he/she works. What part does a positive work environment play in the principal's job satisfaction?

Students provide the most rewarding feature of a school. Their development, their enthusiasm for the future, their innocent approach to some of the problematic aspects of our society, yet their tremendous insight into some of the world's most complicated problems, carries with it an infectious hope for the future. The principal who leads the school and recognizes these student characteristics is compelled to look upon the job as challenging and invigorating. Other factors enter into the work environment besides the community, faculty and students, but personnel more often than not have the most profound impact upon an individual's job. The beauty of the job is directly relational to the human chemistry of those performing the work.

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to survey principals and collect information relative to the principals' perceptions regarding the positive aspects of their job. Survey methodology was used to solicit the perceptions of practicing principals as to the aspects of their jobs that account for high job satisfaction. The basic research question that was used to guide the study was, "What are the

factors that account for the high degree of job satisfaction among public school principals?" The questions were divided into those factors that the principals perceived as relevant to their jobs as they currently perform them and secondly into those factors that served to motivate them into to selecting the principalship as a career. Collateral questions contained in the questionnaire allowed for the collection of data related to the sources of support the principals perceived as making their job more motivational and satisfying.

The questionnaires were mailed to elementary, middle school and high school principals Thirty percent of the principals were randomly chosen from the Indiana School Directory, 2000. This allowed for a total of 153 of the 538 elementary school principals, 64 of the 238 middle school principals and 66 of the 230 high school principals. A total of 283 questionnaires were mailed and 125 responded for a 44% return rate. This sample did not encompass all the schools in Indiana because many are not solely elementary, middle or high school by specific grade level. Many are a combination of both elementary and middle school and some are K-12 in configuration.

Significance of the Study

The knowledge base for principalship training, Principals for our Changing Schools (Thomson, 1993) provides a focused picture of the enormous nature of the school principal's job. In states where educational reform is being implemented, more often than not, the principal's job is at the forefront of change (Haller, Brent & McNamara, 1997). The principal is expected to be an instructional leader, focusing on the teaching-learning process, demonstrating risk-taking and flexibility, encouraging diversity and equity, and reflecting and engaging in systematic inquiry and moral deliberation (Jacobson, 1996). Lezotte (1984) indicated the most important factor in school reform was the leadership of the principal. Chubb(1987) argued that good schools have good

principals, great schools have great principals, and weak schools have weak principals. Essentially, the principal is the key figure to school improvement (Barth, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1995).

The documentation in the preceding paragraph verifies the importance of the principal in improving the nation's schools. A logical corollary to the importance of the role that the principal plays is the health, attitude and morale of the principal who occupies the position. High job satisfaction is a necessary ingredient for high performance. Identification of the variables within the principal's job that serve as motivators may be the key to understanding the high degree of job satisfaction that principals report. The variables may also serve as references for understanding the attractiveness of the job for those who would aspire to be principals.

The shortage of candidates who are entering the principalship is a national dilemma. There is debate as to whether the shortage is real or fabricated, but reliable information from the Educational Research Service (1998) indicates the shortage is real and the quality of existing candidates for the principalship is questionable (Anderson, 1991). In efforts to cope with the problem, schools are attempting to "Grow your own" (Johnson & Douglas, 1990). School leaders look for promising administrative and leadership talent among their teaching staffs and encourage them to pursue administrative and leadership training. Teachers who are leaders in their classrooms have a vision for what they want their students to learn. These same teachers use their philosophy of education to develop meaningful lessons that transform their classrooms (Malone & Caddell, 2000). As schools increasingly move towards site-based governance, what better individuals could develop as principals than those who have already transformed their classrooms? The challenge for school leaders is to convince these teachers to leave the security of the classroom and launch themselves into new careers as principals.

Results And Discussion

Principals were given a survey and asked to respond to statements by rating each one from one to five, where "1" meant a weak reason for liking the job and "5" meant a very strong reason for liking the job. Of the twenty statements in the survey, the one that received the highest percentage of "5" responses was the following:

"I enjoy the contact with students." (rated as a "5" by 75.2% of the responding principals)

The statement that received the second highest percentage, 72.8%, was "I have an opportunity to impact students." The next highest statements were as follows:

"I can make a difference in teaching and learning." (66.4%)

"I have substantial input into the direction of our school." (62.9%)

"I enjoy the school culture." (60.8%)

"I have opportunities to interact with a wide variety of people." (60.0%)

In looking at the weakest reasons for liking the job, the survey revealed these findings: There was a tie for the overall weakest reason as 10.4% mentioned these two reasons: "I am well paid for this job" and "I can influence community decisions." These were followed by:

"I can control my daily schedule." (12.0%)

"I like the high visibility of the job." (13.6%)

"I revel in the cooperation of older teachers." (16.8%)

Sometimes people outside the principal's office mention that the principal makes a good salary and has more freedom than teachers in setting his/her daily schedule. They also may mention that the job has a high visibility that is attractive to principals with big egos. While these statements are true to some extent, the responding principals did not choose them as major reasons for liking their jobs. In fact, as noted above, these reasons were rated at the lower end of the

twenty reasons for liking the job. These principals like working with students and feel that they can make a difference in teaching and learning which has an impact on their students. They are pleased that they can have a substantial input into the direction of their school; they like working with different people at school; and, they enjoy the overall school culture.

As research points out, the majority of superintendents come from principal positions, usually from the high school level. If the number one reason for liking the principalship is the contact with students, the move to the superintendency (or other central office position) may result in disappointment as most superintendents have very little direct contact with students. And, certainly, the relationship between students and the superintendent is very different from that which exists between a principal and his/her students. Principals who enjoy their jobs and aspire to the superintendency should keep this factor in mind.

The principals were also asked to react to fourteen statements regarding their motivation to become a principal in the first place. Again, they were asked to rate these statements from one to five, with "1" meaning a weak motivator for becoming a principal and "5" meaning a very strong motivator. The strongest reason for becoming a principal was "I thought I could make a difference," rated a "5" by 76.8% of the responding principals. The following were also listed as strong reasons for becoming a principal:

"The job would enable me to provide leadership." (56.8%)

"The job would give me a broader span of influence than that of a classroom teacher." (53.2%)

"The job would allow me to help improve the school." (49.6%)

"I wanted to be all I could be (self-actualization)." (45.2%)

Again, we see educators who feel that they can expand their leadership role from the classroom situation into the school as a whole in order to make a difference and improve the school.

In looking at the weakest motivators for these respondents to become a principal, professors of educational administration may be discouraged to find that the weakest motivator was the following: "I took a course in educational leadership and it motivated me to become a principal," according to 0.8% of the responding principals. The next weakest motivators were the following:

"The job would allow me to live in a certain area." (2.4%)

"I had paid my 'dues'." (4.0%)

"The job would provide me with financial security." (10.5%)

"I thought I would like working with the people in the principal's office." (12.1%)

"The principals I had observed and talked with seemed to enjoy their work." (13.6%)

So, not only are university courses not motivators, neither is contact with principals who seem to enjoy being principals. Again, salary is not a large motivator, nor is the concept that these people have paid their "dues" as teachers and/or assistant principals and now feel it is their turn to be principals.

The principalship is a difficult job, and in some schools, a very difficult job. One would not be surprised if those in the position would have second thoughts about sitting in the principal's chair. Yet, when asked if they had it all to do over again, 95.1% of the responding principals said they would choose the principalship again. And, when they were asked to rate their overall job satisfaction, 34.4% rated their satisfaction as very high, with an additional 57.6% rating it as high, for a total of 92% for these two positive ratings.

Obviously, these principals like their positions and find a great deal of satisfaction in their jobs, enjoying the students and feeling that they can make a difference in the learning that goes on in their schools. There is a great deal RIGHT about the principalship as these principals have mentioned, stating overwhelmingly that they would become principals again in spite of the pressures, time commitments, and frustrations that are part of the position. Those people considering the principalship should find these results and opinions encouraging.

Demographics

The responding principals had been in education for a mean of 24.4 years, ranging from seven to 44 years, and in the principalship for a mean of 10.3 years, ranging from one to 31 years.

Of the principals responding, 71.2% were male with 28.8% female.

When asked about the size of their schools (student enrollment), 57.6% were in schools of 300-599, 28.0% had 600-999, 6.4% had 1500-2499, 4.0% had under 300, 4.0% had 1000-1499, and no schools had over 2500 students.

In terms of age, 34.4% were 51-55, 24.0% were 46-50, 12.0% were 56-60, 10.4% were 36-40, 9.6% were 41-45, 2.4% were 61-65, and 0.8% were over 65 years of age. When asked if they were eligible to retire, 44.1% said they would be eligible within five years, 26.3% within 11-15 years, and 25.4% within 6-10 years. In responding to a question about marital status, 91.9% said they were married, 3.2% were single, and 4.8% were divorced.

In checking to see to what extent they had worked elsewhere, the principals were asked if all of their educational work experience had been in Indiana. They responded with 71.5% YES and 28.5% NO. Also, 90.3% said that they had no educational administrative experience outside Indiana. The current principalship was the first one for 51.2% of the respondents, with 35.0% saying it was their second, 8.1% their third, 4.9% their fourth, and 0.8% their fifth principalship.

Those responding to the survey were elementary principals (50.8%), middle school principals (15.3%), and high school principals (33.9%). Further delineation revealed the following: Their school was one of several elementary schools in the district for 49.2%, the only elementary school for 1.6%, one of several middle schools for 5.6%, the only middle school for 9.7%, one of several high schools for 6.5%, and the only high school for 27.4% of the principals.

References

Anderson, M. E. (1991). Principals: How to train, recruit, select, induct, and evaluate leaders for America's schools. University of Oregon: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Barth, R. S. Improving Schools from Within. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Chubb, J. E. (1987). Effective Schools and the problems of the poor. Policy Options for the Future of Compensatory Education. The Brookings Institution: Washington, D. C. UD 026 334.

Daresh, J. C. (January, 1997). Improving principal preparation: A review of common strategies. NASSP Bulletin 81(585). 3-8.

Educational Research Service (1998). Is there a shortage of qualified candidates for openings in the principalship? An exploratory study. Jointly sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Haller, E. J., Brent, B. O. & McNamara, J.H. (November, 1997). Does graduate training in educational administration improve America's schools? Phi Delta Kappan 79(3), 222-227.

Indiana School Directory, 2000. published by the Indiana Department of Education, Dr. Suellen Reed, Superintendent of Public Instruction. Indianapolis, IN

Jacobson, S. L. (July, 1996) School leadership in an age of reform: New directions in principal preparation. International Journal of Educational Reform 5(3). 271-277.

Johnson, M. C. & Douglas, J. R. (May, 1990). Grow–your-own—A model for selecting administrators. NASSP Bulletin 74(526). 34-38.

Jolly, K. J. (1999). The influence of demographics, training, experience, school and community setting, and working conditions on the job satisfaction of beginning Californian public elementary school principals. Dissertation Abstracts International, 60(4-A).0957

Lane, S.R. (2001). Stress type and leadership style in the principalship. Dissertation Abstracts International, 61(7-A). 2538

Lezotte, L. W. (1984). School effectiveness research: A tribute to Ron Edmonds. "One Perspective on an Effective Schools' Research Agenda." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association (New Orleans, LA. April 23-27). Database # ED 252961.

Malone, B. G. & Caddell, T. A. (2000, January, February). A crisis in leadership: Where are tomorrow's principals? The Clearing House 73(3), 162-164.

Malone, B. G. (2001). Compiled comments contained in student assignment, "Why I Want to Be An Administrator," in Introduction to Leadership course taught by the author.

Malone, B. G., Sharp, W.L., & Thompson, J.C. Jr., (2000, October). The Indiana Principalship: Perceptions of Principals, Aspiring Principals, and Superintendents. A paper presentation at the Annual Conference of the Midwestern Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Reynolds, M. L. P (1999). An exploratory case study of mentoring relationships of selected principals. Dissertation Abstracts International, 60(4-A). 0966

Robinson, G. R. (1999). Career orientation analysis of selected Indiana middle level principals. Dissertation Abstracts International,

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1995). The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective. 3rd ed. Needham Heights, Mass: Allyn and Bacon.

Thomson, S. D. (1993). Principals for our Changing Schools: Knowledge and Skill Base. National Policy Board for Educational Administration.